Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 06-43-196
Week of October 23, 2006

BUSINESS PICKING UP FOR FEED GRAIN AND FORAGE LISTING SERVICE

A free "online bulletin board" maintained on the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) website can be a big help to provincial cattle producers who find themselves facing a shortage or an excess of feed heading into the winter.

"It's a forum for farmers to advertise the sale of products and services," explained Andre Bonneau, a Forage Conversion Specialist with SAF.

The Feed Grain and Forage Listing Service connects farmers looking to buy and sell forage and feed resources throughout Saskatchewan, as well as neighbouring provinces and states like Alberta, Manitoba, Montana and North Dakota – all at no charge to users.

The tool also provides postings for popular custom farm services such as grazing and feeding, cutting and baling, seeding, spraying, trucking, combining, grain drying and manure hauling.

The listing contains interactive maps that enable users to see, by rural municipality, where there are postings for available baled forage, standing forage, feed grain and various custom services. A complete listing for the entire province is also accessible.

Another valuable tool on the listing service is a summary of the baled forage and feed grain prices that sellers have posted on the site. "It's a weighted average of the asking price for all the forage and feed listed, so it gives you a fairly good idea of what the range of prices are, and what the average prices are," said Bonneau.

The Feed Grain and Forage Listing Service has proven to be one of SAF's most popular and long-serving programs. According to Bonneau, "There's been a manual version, a hard copy, since the early 1980s, at least. The electronic version started up in the mid-90s. It became an electronic, self-service bulletin board about the time the Internet started getting popular."

There are currently around 200 postings for available feed products and custom services listed on the site. "Usage is generally highest this time of year, both looking and selling," Bonneau noted.

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"We get probably anywhere from 15 to 20 calls a week with submissions for advertising. Because it is mainly forage and feed that are listed, it gets busier around this time of year. It slows down in the summer, when it is mainly things like custom work and standing forage that are offered for sale."

To advertise a product or service, or to browse the available listings, Internet users can visit the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca and click on the "Feed Grain and Forage Listing" link.

Farmers who do not have Internet access can call SAF's Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 to have items posted for sale on their behalf or to have a copy of the listing sent to them. "Some RMs will also download the listing right off the Internet and post it in the RM office," Bonneau noted, "so that might be another option for producers."

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For more information, contact:

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SEMINAR OFFERS HELP FOR THOSE WHO ARE "SLEEPLESS IN SASKATCHEWAN"

If you're a farmer who's spent a night or two looking out at the sheep instead of counting them, you know how important a good rest can be. An upcoming seminar in Regina, co-hosted by the Farm Stress Line, will take a closer look at sleep science – and how to make our snoozing have a positive impact on our waking hours.

"Sleepless in Saskatchewan" is a one-day forum that looks at the dynamics of sleep and how everyone can make sleep work more effectively for them.

Co-organizer Ken Imhoff with the Farm Stress Line of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) said the seminar can appeal to anyone. "Service providers, people experiencing difficulties with sleep, people who work with others in situations where sleep can be impacted – they would all benefit from the day," he noted.

The agenda covers a wide range of sleep topics, including 21st century life and how it affects our body clocks; high stress and its impact on behaviour; career commitment and its relationship to stress; our daily routines and how they can affect sleep; the science of sleep; and extended work hours and their effects on our physical and psychological well-being.

The workshop presenter is Jon Shearer, who has been involved with sleep research since 1977. Shearer was a founding member of the Carlton University Laboratory for Sleep and Chronopsychology, and has since conducted studies and field work with the Atlantic Police Academy and the Canadian Subarctic Project. He is currently a professor of psychology, philosophy and cross-cultural relations at Algonquin College in Ottawa.

Imhoff has heard Shearer speak before, and says his easy, approachable presentation style makes the experience fly by.

"One thing about this presentation is you'll never fall asleep during it," said Imhoff. "It's very energized and positive. Jon takes complex topics and makes them entertaining and easy to understand."

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One such topic is the "Science of Sleep" presentation, in which participants will learn about various methods science has shown to increase positive sleep – the kind of rest that truly does a body good. The topic also includes a discussion about how your diet can affect your sleep, beyond the obvious answers like cutting down on the coffee.

"Sleepless in Saskatchewan" is co-hosted by the Farm Stress Line of SAF and the Institute of Agricultural Rural Environmental Health based at the University of Saskatchewan. The seminar takes place from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 8. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m., and the program starts at 8:45 a.m.

The cost for attending is $140 per person, which includes a continental breakfast at registration and lunch during the seminar. The event takes place at the South Albert Street Travelodge Hotel in Regina. Special room rates are available for those attending from out of town.

Anyone interested in registering for the seminar or learning more about the event can contact Ken Imhoff by phone at (306) 787-5196 or e-mail at kimhoff@agr.gov.sk.ca.

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NEW "STEP" FOR AGRICULTURAL EXPORTERS

Saskatchewan's agricultural exporters will soon have new tools and services to help them reach the world with their products.

The Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP) is restructuring to better serve existing members and attract new ones. Those changes include moving to a sector-based approach rather than a geographic approach.

The three sectors being focused on are manufacturing, technology and services, and agri-value.

The agri-value sector includes animal feeds and veterinary products, seeds, specialty crops, organic products, livestock and animal products, processed food and beverages, nutraceuticals and functional foods, and bio-fuels and bio-refining.

Approximately 50 per cent of STEP members are in the agricultural sector.

STEP President and CEO Dale Botting says the move is about strengthening existing tools and expanding the slate of services that STEP provides to its more than 254 exporting members and 122 companies who service exporters.

"The big change here is our focus on sectors, rather than basing our work on geographic locations. That means more streamlined service for our members," said Botting.

"Another important component of this restructuring is the creation of the Export Services Division. The new division expands what we do for our members, well beyond trade development. It will co-ordinate all of our international finance and logistics counselling services, as well as expand existing programs and develop new programs and services," said Botting.

The restructuring follows consultation with the STEP membership, staff and management. Botting says the changes are a direct response to that feedback.

"It's important for STEP to respond to our members' needs, as well as to attract new members. This restructuring gives us the tools to do just that. We feel we have done a good job in the past – now it's time to be great," said Botting.

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The restructuring includes a more proactive approach to member contact and networking. One aspect of this new approach is now underway, as STEP begins a series of regional meetings.

STEP is a non-profit, membership-driven, government/industry partnership designed to promote the growth of Saskatchewan's export industry. STEP helps provincial businesses realize global marketing opportunities through specially tailored services and programs. STEP pursues growth in existing foreign markets and opens doors to new ones. Members include both businesses that are experienced, and those that are new to international trade.

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GROWING INTEREST IN GREENHOUSE AND VEGETABLE SECTORS

Hundreds of producers will converge on TCU Place in Saskatoon on November 10-12 for the 2006 Saskatchewan Greenhouse and Vegetable Growers Conference.

The conference is a joint project of the Saskatchewan Greenhouse Growers Association and the Saskatchewan Vegetable Growers Association.

Glen Sweetman, Greenhouse and Nursery Crops Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says the focus in on education for people in the industry and those who may want to get into the business.

"We're bringing the world to our growers," said Sweetman. "We have a world-class line-up of speakers, all of whom are leaders in their respective fields."

The 19 speakers include the likes of Pam Wasson, the Vice President of Marketing for North America's largest nursery; Ian Baldwin, a garden consultant renowned across North America; and Dr. Alan Hammer, a former Perdue University professor.

Discussion will include topics such as value chains and unusual or rare insects that endanger greenhouse vegetables. However, the focus is not just on production. There are a number of sessions on the sales and advertising aspects of the business.

The conference begins with workshops on the evening of November 10, and concludes on November 12. It is expected to draw well over 250 participants.

"The conference has a really high industry attendance," said Sweetman. "One of the reasons is because the conference is a terrific value for its cost. The registration not only includes the speakers, but a trade show, two luncheons and a banquet. Most other shows of this nature only include the speakers for the same price."

Joan Merrill, a vegetable producer with Robertson Valley Farms near Saskatoon, says the chance to network with other producers is extremely valuable.

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"When you are a vegetable grower in Saskatchewan, there are not a lot of precedents to look to or rely on. So clearly, this is an opportunity to talk to people about what kinds of things they are inventing, as well as growing techniques," said Merrill.

Sweetman says there are a lot of prospects for expansion for greenhouse operators and vegetable growers in this province.

"The industry represents a good opportunity for direct marketing in a rural situation as well as in the cities," he noted. "For greenhouses, there are still growth opportunities in a number of areas of Saskatchewan. We have areas of specialization, such as vegetable and herb production, where the potential is not even close to being tapped yet. They are all growing. They are all developing. They are all maturing. It's all in motion."

Merrill agrees.

"Interest in farm diversification is growing. Direct-selling and vegetable marketing are just two of those diversification opportunities that more farmers could pick up on," she said.

More information about the conference and details about registration can be found on the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca/skgreenhouse/calendar.asp.

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CONVERTING CROP LAND TO PASTURE TAKES PLANNING

An increasing number of Saskatchewan farmers are looking at converting their crop land to pasture or forage, with crops such as alfalfa, timothy, brome and various grasses generating a lot of interest.

But according to Andre Bonneau, a Forage Conversion Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), there's one key ingredient that producers can't overlook in their efforts. "It's planning," he said.

"Generally, we tell people that, if they have the time and want to put in a perennial forage crop, they should prepare at least a year in advance, maybe even two years depending on where they are. That's mainly to deal with perennial weeds."

Bonneau added that it may be possible to prepare for the conversion over a shorter timeframe, but the primary factor is weed control. "Depending on the weeds, where you are and what your production practices are, you want to make sure your perennial weeds are taken care of at least by the fall before seeding," he said. "So, if you're planning on seeding forages next spring, it should be a priority that your perennial weeds, both your grasses and your broadleaf weeds, are taken care of before freeze-up."

The emphasis on removing unwanted vegetation in advance is because it becomes increasingly difficult to dispose of it once the forage cover is introduced. "Often there's a problem with a perennial weed growing in an alfalfa, grass or mixed crop. Perennial weeds are very tough to take out of a perennial forage stand. For example, dandelions are almost impossible to remove from an alfalfa stand," Bonneau noted.

Bonneau suggested there may be a number of reasons for the growing popularity of converting crop land to pasture or forage, including the reduced input costs that go along with a perennial rather than an annual crop.

"It's also been shown more and more that perennial forages have a really nice place in a crop rotation, for fertility and weed control. For example, alfalfa fixes a lot of nitrogen in the soil during its lifetime, so when you go into an annual crop after the alfalfa, it will be taking up a lot of that nitrogen," he added.

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"But I think, for the most part, it's just a general shift in many areas of the province towards more livestock-based production and away from an annual cropping system. There seems to be more attention paid to livestock production right now, and either they're producing forage for themselves or they're producing it for their neighbours," said Bonneau.

There is some assistance available to farmers interested in making a switch to forage. The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) has renewed its Greencover Canada program for one more year, through 2007. The program offers financial assistance for producers wishing to seed environmentally sensitive land to a perennial crop cover. Applications forms can be obtained from the PFRA website (which is presently being updated) or by calling 1-866-844-5620. The application deadline is January 31, 2007, for seeding this coming spring.

Bonneau stated there may also be more indirect help available through the federal-provincial Agricultural Policy Framework (APF). "Once a person goes through the Environmental Farm Plan, they have access to the Farm Stewardship Program through the APF. Basically, it's money available to help correct any environmental problems the Environmental Farm Plan may have identified," he explained.

"So if the problem is a riparian area where you need a perennial forage or a perennial species to help control erosion, or if it's very poor land where wind erosion may be an issue, there may be money available to do that."

More information about the process of converting crop land to pasture or forage can be found on the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca, or by calling the SAF Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

According to Bonneau, "It's been a popular subject for people calling into the centre, with questions ranging from species selection and fertility, all the way up to the economics and trying to plan a good sales strategy for forage crops. So it ranges quite a bit, and we can try to help producers with all those kinds of issues."

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